

H.R. 4995 / S. 2705

TRIBAL WILDLIFE CORRIDORS ACT

Image 1: Herd of deer in Point Reyes, California
Source: Hari Nandakumar



Workshop in Applied Earth Systems Management
MPA in Environmental Science and Policy
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Acknowledgements

We recognize that Columbia University and the City of New York are located on the ancestral lands of the Lenape, Rockaway, and Canarsie people. We honor and pay respect to all indigenous people by recognizing their relationship with this land.

We thank our advisor, Professor Ryshelle McCadney, for her constant guidance, support, and generosity throughout the duration of this workshop.

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Executive Summary

Habitat degradation and fragmentation can lead to habitat loss and biodiversity loss through the decrease of suitable resources and the inability for species to migrate. Habitat degradation and loss is the number one cause of global biodiversity loss (*Living Planet Report 2020*, 2020), which harms key ecosystem services around the world, including the 56 million acres of Native American reservation land in the United States (*What is a federal Indian reservation?*, n.d.), much of which is located near protected areas and in ranges of threatened species. Indigenous tribes in the United States are uniquely impacted by habitat fragmentation because of historical displacement onto scattered reservation land and the lack of adequate federal funding to manage this land for conservation purposes.

Wildlife corridors are one step towards addressing this multi-layered problem by providing habitat connectivity and allowing movement between fragmented areas. Native American reservation land is critical habitat for many species of conservation concern; therefore, creating corridors on reservation lands will increase connectivity between important wildlife habitats.

In order to address this concern, the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2021 (H.R. 4995/S.2705) was introduced by Representative Rubén Gallego (D-AZ) in the House of Representatives and by Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) in August 2021. The Act allows tribes to nominate an area of land as a “Tribal Wildlife Corridor” and, if approved, provides them with access to technical assistance and grant funding with the goal of improving habitat connectivity both within tribal lands and between tribal and public lands.

This report assumes the passage of the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2021 and proposes a program design for the implementation of the Act. It names the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as the branches of the Department of the Interior (DOI) responsible for implementation, and it details the corridor nomination process and the creation of an application-based grant program. Our program design emphasizes tribal equity and tribal consultation, in line with numerous current federal government initiatives including Justice40; the DOI Equity Plan; and the reinforced commitment to Executive Order 13175, *Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments*.

This report also details a Year 1 Program Implementation Plan for the USFWS and the BIA to follow during the first year after the bill’s passage in order to successfully implement the program. This includes tasks such as recruiting and training, strategic planning, and criteria development. It also provides metrics for program monitoring and measuring success.

INTRODUCTION

Inadequate funding for Native American land management caused by historical inequity has led to a decline in habitat quality and a loss of biodiversity. The creation and maintenance of wildlife corridors on tribal lands is necessary to facilitate connectivity and improve ecosystem health while providing funding and assistance to historically underfunded groups. By addressing the federal funding gap for Native American ecosystem conservation and restoration programs, tribes can better protect and manage their land, wildlife, and natural resources.



Image 2: Fox in Silverthorne, Colorado
Source: Nathan Anderson

BIODIVERSITY LOSS AND HABITAT FRAGMENTATION

Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth. It refers to the diversity of life at all levels - diversity within a species (genetic diversity), between species (species diversity), and between ecosystems (ecosystem diversity) (Gaston & Spicer, 2013). Biodiversity holds important cultural, economic, scientific, and intrinsic values and supports human activities through the provision of ecosystem services. For example, wetlands act as flood control systems and support a variety of plant species that filter and purify water for human consumption.

However, biodiversity loss is an increasing global threat to the natural world with one million species currently facing the threat of extinction (UN Report, 2019). The loss of these species would have significant impacts on the ability of all ecosystems to thrive, which would have detrimental economic and

cultural costs to human populations as ecosystem services become depleted. The World Wildlife Fund’s Living Planet Index, which measures the state of global biodiversity, attributes the largest cause of biodiversity loss to “land use, habitat loss, and degradation,” which makes up 52.5% of total global threats to biodiversity (*Living Planet Report 2020*, 2020).

Habitat degradation occurs when existing habitats become less suitable environments for supporting life. As habitats become more and more degraded, whether through natural occurrences such as fire or due to human activities such as deforestation, habitat fragmentation occurs. Habitat fragmentation is the process through which large habitats are broken down into smaller pieces divided by uninhabitable land. Continual habitat degradation and fragmentation eventually lead to habitat loss, in which a habitat is no longer able to function ecologically and support species survival.

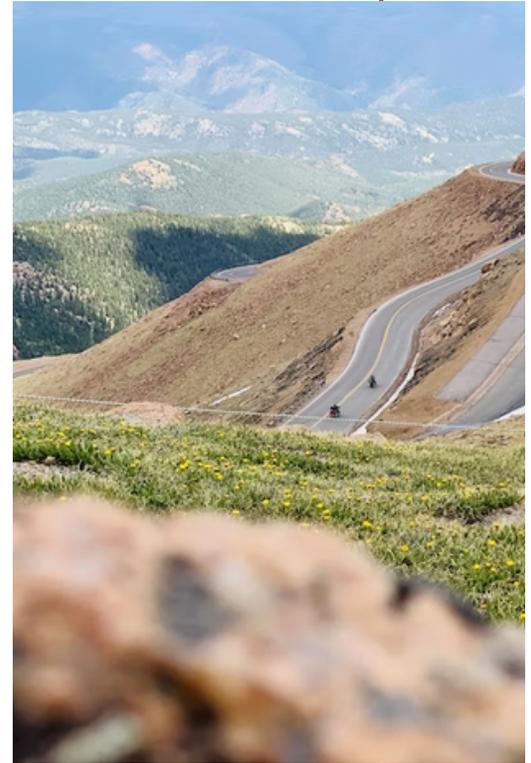


Image 3: Road dividing habitat in Pike and San Isabel National Forests, Colorado
Source: Julio Rivera



Image 4: Flock of seagulls in Middle Creek Management Area, Pennsylvania
Source: Barth Bailey

Habitat fragmentation impacts biodiversity because it decreases the ability of species to move, migrate, and breed successfully. Species are confined to their habitat fragment and have to cross uninhabitable, and potentially large and dangerous, areas of land in order to access new habitat. This means that species are limited to only those resources found in their habitat fragment. Species also cannot access mates in other fragments, which reduces the gene pool and leads to inbreeding (Gibbs, 2001; Neaves et al., 2015). In addition, habitat fragmentation impacts the ability of species to migrate due to weather or seasonal changes. This may become especially harmful as climate change makes existing habitats unsuitable and species attempt to migrate to higher elevations or latitudes. All of these negative factors impact the ability of species to survive, grow, and reproduce, threatening the genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity on Earth.

WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

One solution to this multifaceted issue is the creation and maintenance of wildlife corridors. Wildlife corridors are areas of land that connect two habitat fragments together, facilitating and encouraging the movement of species between habitats. This means that species will have access to the necessary resources and genetically-diverse mates in other habitats, as well as undergo biologically important migrations.

The actualization of a wildlife corridor can encompass many different concepts. Wildlife corridors can be extremely localized and responsive to local conditions, such as an overpass that connects two habitat fragments divided by a highway, or they can be large swaths of land connecting a multitude of habitat fragments. For example, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) connects habitats across 2,100 miles of land across North America and Canada (*see Case Study 1*) (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, n.d.).

CASE STUDY 1: YELLOWSTONE TO YUKON CONSERVATION INITIATIVE (Y2Y)

2,100 miles of land between the Yellowstone National Park in the US and the Yukon region of Canada is one of the largest organized wildlife corridors in the world. The Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) initiative is a partnership between 400 organizations to protect biodiversity, restore degraded land for connectivity, and divert human development away from critical habitat (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative). Wolves, bison, and grizzly bears are some of the many species whose habitats are included in the corridor.

Unique to the success of Y2Y is the collaboration and connection of various stakeholders and land types with varying jurisdictions.

Stakeholders engage in research, provide financial support, or execute conservation plans. Beyond the stakeholder engagement and cooperation, Y2Y bridges multiple governmental jurisdictions; the federal government of two nations, several state governments, and over 75 tribal nations (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, n.d.). The large number of tribal nations involved in Y2Y highlights the criticality of both tribal consultation and connection to tribal lands (Indigenous Peoples leading the way on conservation in the Yellowstone to Yukon region and beyond, 2020). In terms of land ownership, 80% of the corridor is public land and 20% is private or tribal reservation land (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, n.d.). The variety of land type, jurisdiction, and stakeholders all come together to protect core habitat and migration routes. Y2Y offers a precedent for successful wildlife corridor creation and how to integrate and prioritize the land management of tribal and indigenous peoples.

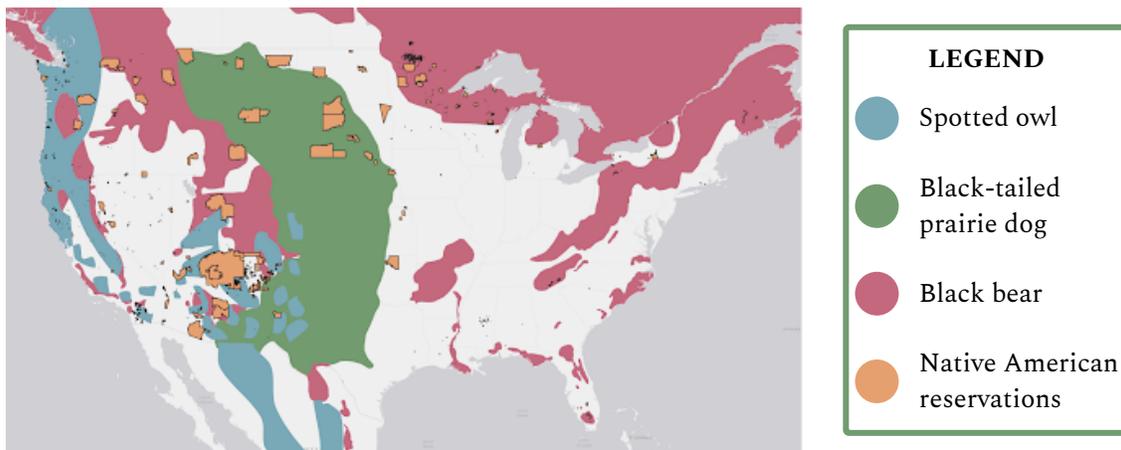


Image 5: Elk moving along Yellowstone
Source: Taylor Wright

TRIBAL WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

The expansiveness and success of Y2Y highlights the importance of engaging many different stakeholders in habitat conservation projects at all levels, including federal governments, state governments, and tribal nations. In the United States, Native American reservations cover over 56 million acres of land, much of which encompasses critical habitat for species of concern (*What is a federal Indian reservation?*, n.d.). The below map displays the location of Native American reservations in relation to the species ranges for three species of concern: the black bear, the black-tailed prairie dog, and the spotted owl. These species are priorities for conservation through wildlife corridors because they are 1) migratory, and thus must be able to travel across habitats, 2) endemic, and therefore not found elsewhere in the world, and 3) umbrella species, meaning that other species within the geographic region rely on them for their survival (North American Environmental Atlas, 2008; Endemic species, n.d.; Roberge & Angelstam, 2004). In order to fully protect species of concern, wildlife corridors located on Native American tribal land, or tribal wildlife corridors, must be included in conservation efforts.

Figure 1: Range of key migratory, endemic, and transboundary species overlapping with Native American reservation lands.



Data Source: North American Environmental Atlas, ArcGIS Online

Many Native American tribes also have a special interest in wildlife corridors and conservation because of their important historical and cultural relationship with their land and the species that inhabit it. For example, the Santa Ana Pueblo tribe of New Mexico recently undertook extensive habitat restoration initiatives to reintroduce two culturally important species: the pronghorn and the wild turkey (*see Case Study 2*) (*Santa Ana Pueblo*, n.d.).

CASE STUDY 2: SANTA ANA PUEBLO

The Santa Ana Pueblo implemented measures to restore their degraded land. Their land, referred to as the Tamaya Reservation Land, is over 79,000 acres in New Mexico along the Upper Rio Grande (*Connected Corridors*, n.d.). Over time the land has become degraded, overgrazed, and overhunted. Significant human development compounded the land degradation and fragmentation. The reservation is bordered by several interstates, endangering local species. Home to the Tamaya Reservation Land are culturally important species such as the wild turkey and pronghorn whose populations had virtually disappeared (*Connected Corridors*, n.d.).

In response to this concern, the Santa Ana Pueblo embarked on an ambitious plan to improve and restore habitats for species conservation. The Santa Ana began by establishing their own Department of Natural Resources. This was paired with extensive scientific research, outreach and education, and restricted hunting practices (*Connected Corridors*, n.d.).

“

We can't do this work in isolation. To have a real meaningful impact at a landscape scale, our neighbors—whether it's other tribal communities, private landowners or federal and state land managers – they also need to be pro-active in protecting migration corridors and restoring and improving wildlife habitats on their lands.

”

- Glenn Harper, Range and Wildlife Division Manager,
Santa Ana Pueblo Department of Natural Resources

The Santa Ana reintroduced the pronghorn and the wild turkey after significant land restoration and management practices. The additional purchase of 60,000 acres of land contributed to habitat growth (*Connected Corridors*, n.d.). The Tamaya Reservation now acts as part of a larger corridor with other land types to connect habitat along the migration pathways of species such as bear, deer, cougar, and elk.

Leaders of the project urge that there is still more work to be done, such as connecting their habitat to existing federally protected areas. Funding can be a primary stimulus for further conservation efforts and provide the much needed support to expand corridors. The Santa Ana Pueblo is an example of the impact that conservation projects on reservation land can have to culturally important species and tribal communities, underscoring the important role that tribes play in ecosystem restoration and conservation.

NEED FOR LEGISLATION

While Native American tribal lands contain many species in need of conservation and protection, they have historically suffered from a lack of adequate funding from the United States federal government. Through the signage of 375 treaties over the course of United States' history, the federal government has established a "trust" relationship with Native American tribes. In this relationship, the federal government holds a significant portion of Native American land in trust, which "obligates the federal government to promote tribal self-government, support the general welfare of Native American tribes and villages, and to protect their lands and resources," but it has been consistently failing to do so (*Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*, 2018).

A 2018 report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found a severe lack of federal funding directed towards Native American tribes, which negatively impacts "the public safety, health care, education, housing, and economic development of Native tribes and people" (*Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans*, 2018). This includes Department of the Interior programs that suffer from inadequate funds to restore habitat and protect wildlife on Native American lands. For example, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service manages a State Wildlife Grant Program (SWGP) and a Tribal Wildlife Grant Program (TWGP) to support projects that protect and conserve fish and wildlife. From 2000-2020, the SWGP awarded over \$1 billion to states, territories, commonwealths, and the District of Columbia, while from 2001-2020, tribal nations received only \$94 million from the TWGP. In addition, only 25% of tribal applicants are awarded grants each year, leaving the remaining 75% without funding (*United States Fish and Wildlife Service*, 2020).

It is crucial to finance this gap with dedicated federal funding to tribes to ensure that 1) the federal trust responsibility is met, 2) these critical habitats are not left out of ecosystem restoration work, and 3) tribal cultural integrity is protected. This would follow decades of precedent in the federal government's approach to Native American relations, which focuses on promoting tribal self-sovereignty and providing Native American tribes with increased decision-making power over their own lands.



Image 6: Fish migrating up waterfall in Seward, Alaska

Source: Drew Farwell

Bill Summary

H.R. 4995/S. 2705:

Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act

The issues of habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss, and tribal land management highlight the need for federal policy that directs funding and technical assistance to Native American tribes for habitat conservation projects. The Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act addresses this gap in policy and funding and provides the Department of the Interior (DOI) with discretion to define conservation priorities and implementation goals.

Policy Objective

The Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2021 (hereafter, “the Act”) was introduced in the United States House of Representatives and Senate by Representative Rubén Gallego (D-AZ) and Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-NM), respectively, in August 2021. The Act establishes a process for the creation of wildlife corridors on tribal reservation lands and provides means to stimulate the establishment of corridors with mechanisms such as technical assistance and grant funding. The Act authorizes up to \$50 million to carry out the program each fiscal year, beginning in 2022. This funding will be a part of the annual budget of the DOI and must be reauthorized by Congress each year.

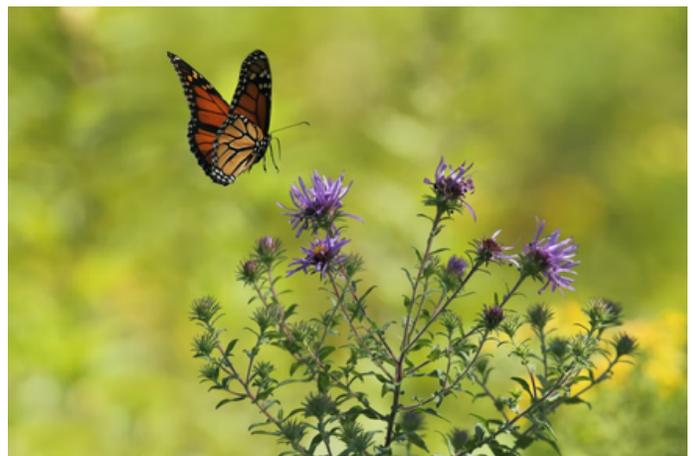


Image 7: Monarch butterfly in Swan Creek Preserve, Ohio
Source: Gary Bendig

Key Legislative Mandates

The Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2021 directs the DOI to act through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and in consultation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to implement the mandated actions. It defines two main activities:

1. The designation of a corridor as a “Tribal Wildlife Corridor” through a nomination process
2. The creation of a grant program to aid in the creation and maintenance of the Tribal Wildlife Corridors (S. 2705/H.R. 4995)

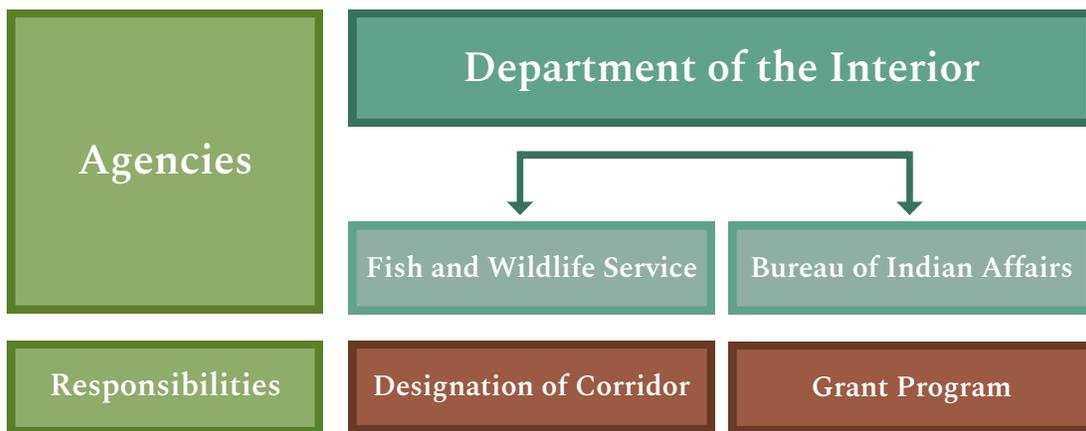


Figure 2: Agencies and responsibilities as mandated by the Act.

Organizational Structure

The Act defines the institutions responsible for its implementation. The DOI is the primary responsible agency. The DOI is tasked with managing the country’s natural resources as well as upholding federal tribal trust responsibility (*U.S. Department of Interior*, n.d.). The DOI shall implement the Act through the Directors of the USFWS and the BIA.

Activities



Corridor Nomination

The Act mandates that a Native American tribe may nominate a wildlife corridor on its land to be designated a “Tribal Wildlife Corridor.” This designation provides tribes with access to technical assistance from the DOI, mandates that the DOI must consult with the tribe to explore opportunities to expand the corridor, and makes corridors eligible for grant program funding. Once a tribe nominates an area of land, the DOI must either approve or deny the nomination based upon a set of criteria within 90 days of receiving the nomination request. The criteria for approval of a “Tribal Wildlife Corridor” must be established within 18 months of the Act’s passage. The Act defines the minimum criteria as: “the restoration of historical habitats,” “the management of land for the purposes of facilitating connectivity,” and the “management of land to prevent the imposition of barriers that may hinder current or future connectivity” (S. 2705/H.R. 4995). The Native American tribe is allowed to choose to remove the designation of Tribal Wildlife Corridors at any point; however, they would no longer receive any further assistance or funding for the corridor.



Grant Program

No later than three years after the Act passes, the DOI must create a grant program to support the establishment, expansion, and management of Tribal Wildlife Corridors. Grant program funding must be distributed to at least one tribe within three years of the law’s passage. Criteria for evaluating grant applications is not mandated in the bill, and the DOI has discretion on how to allocate grant funding.

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND FEASIBILITY

The Act was introduced by Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-NM) and Representative Rubén Gallego (D-AZ). Sen. Luján represents a state with many indigenous constituents and a wide variety of wildlife. Rep. Gallego on the other hand does not have a large population of indigenous tribes within his district, but he has taken a personal interest in indigenous political rights and wildlife conservation. In August of 2021, the proposed legislation was referred to the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry in the House of Representatives, as well as the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, where it remains in review.

Several attempts were made in recent years by members of Congress to pass similar legislation. In May 2019, Senator Tom Udall and Representative Donald S. Beyer, Jr. introduced the Wildlife Conservation Act of 2019 (H.R. 2795/S. 1499) to authorize the creation of a National Wildlife Corridor System, including a provision for tribal wildlife corridors. It was last referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works and stalled there. In November 2019, Sen. Udall and Rep. Rubén Gallego introduced what would be the first iteration of the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act (H.R. 5179/S. 2891). This version of the bill went through several committees and committee hearings, but ultimately did not pass through either chamber of Congress.

The Act has extensive support from tribal nations. For example, the governor of the Santa Ana Pueblo, Lawrence Montoya, submitted written testimony to Congress in support of the bill's potential to improve habitat fragmentation on their land (Written Testimony of Lawrence Montoya, Governor of the Pueblo of Santa Ana, New Mexico Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, 2020).

However, the Act does not currently have bipartisan support. The main opponents of the bill are Republican members of Congress. Their concerns include: 1) further strain on the Department of the Interior's existing extensive backlog; 2) redundancy with Secretarial Order 3362, which attempts to restore migration corridors for big game; 3) prioritization of conservation projects over other land uses; and 4) budgetary constraints from additional environmental reviews. Opposition also comes from private industry, farmers' and miners' associations, and land developers, who are concerned about the potential loss of private land and natural resources with the development of wildlife corridors.



The potential elimination of traditionally-important wildlife on our land would directly threaten our ability to engage in important religious ceremonies that ensure the persistence of our cultural identity, now, and deep into the future."

- Lawrence Montoya, Governor, Santa Ana Pueblo (Written Testimony)

Areas of Discretion

The mandated actions and organization structure from the Act will form the basis of the program design. However, the Act allows the DOI significant rulemaking discretion. Following the three primary criteria for corridor designation, the DOI is able to define any additional criteria deemed necessary. Beyond this, the DOI is tasked with designing and implementing the grant program, where the DOI has full discretion to define criteria and priorities for this program.

The DOI can also expand on and develop several of the other features from the bill as it sees fit. Discretion is granted in composing an application for corridor designation and grant program, framing the specifics of the tribal consultation process, gearing technical assistance towards the needs of tribes, and determining the extent of public engagement and outreach.



Image 8: Bison in Yellowstone National Park
Source: Steven Cordes

Bill Implementation: Program Design

In order to implement the actions mandated by the Act, the Department of the Interior (DOI) must determine how to address the areas of discretion. This involves designing a program that establishes the Department's priorities for the corridor designation process, the distribution of technical assistance, and the allocation of grant funding.

Preliminary Action: Corridor Designation

The first key action mandated by the Act is the designation of "Tribal Wildlife Corridors". A Native American tribe may nominate a corridor, either existing or proposed, to the DOI for designation as a "Tribal Wildlife Corridor". Once a tribe submits a Tribal Wildlife Corridor nomination application to the DOI, the agency has 90 days to approve or reject the nomination based on a set of criteria. The Act defines a specific set of three minimum criteria that a corridor must meet to be designated as a "Tribal Wildlife Corridor". These three criteria are:

1. The restoration of historical habitat for the purposes of facilitating connectivity
2. The management of land for the purposes of facilitating connectivity
3. The management of land to prevent the imposition of barriers that may hinder current or future connectivity (S. 2705/H.R. 4995)

For the first three rounds of corridor nominations, these three criteria will be used for designation. Having specific and prescriptive criteria would likely disincentivize tribes from nominating a corridor; therefore, the program design keeps the criteria broad during the first three rounds to allow flexibility for both the DOI and the tribes to designate as many corridors as possible. However, in future rounds, there is the potential for more criteria to be added based on program or Technical Advisory Group recommendations - this process will be discussed in the Program Implementation section.

If the nomination is approved, the corridor is designated as a "Tribal Wildlife Corridor" and the tribe is now eligible to apply for the grant program and receive technical assistance if desired. The tribe may use this technical assistance in order to collect the data necessary to submit a grant application.

Secondary Action: Tribal Wildlife Corridor Grant Program

The second key action mandated in the Act is the creation of a grant program to facilitate the establishment of Tribal Wildlife Corridors. The Act does not define any specific criteria or priorities for the grant program and gives the DOI full discretion over its design. As such, our team has outlined a grant program design that would allow the DOI to most effectively carry out the mandates set by the Act.

The program design was decided on after internal discussions considering the prioritization of corridors given limited resources while still meeting the Act’s objective of increasing connectivity in the face of habitat fragmentation, climate change, and biodiversity loss.



Image 9: Brown bear on Kodiak Island in Alaska
Source: Brent Jones

Application Process

The “Tribal Wildlife Corridor Grant Program,” herein referred to as “the Grant Program,” will be an application based program, meaning that tribes that have a designated Tribal Wildlife Corridor will be eligible to submit an application for funding. By establishing an application process, it allows tribes to state exact funding needs in their communities, creating an inherent bottom-up approach. Funding applications can be submitted for a variety of activities, which are discussed in more detail below. Applications will be released in month 10 of each year and due at the end of month 12. The DOI will then review the applications and make allocation decisions. In the application, the tribe will need to provide a detailed proposal on what they intend to use the funding on. Tribes will also need to detail the biological impact and connectivity potential of their proposal if such information is available.

Bill Implementation

Grant Criteria - Prioritizing Quality of Corridors Funded

The Grant Program will prioritize distributing the \$50 million annual budget towards the Tribal Wildlife Corridors that will have the greatest positive ecological impact. Therefore, applications received from the tribes will contain and be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. Biological benefits for species, especially those of tribal importance;
2. Location in or near a migratory pathway;
3. Location in or near fragmented land;
4. Prevention of invasive species and land degradation;
5. Impact on connectivity both within the corridor and to public lands.

The DOI will receive these applications, evaluate them according to the criteria, and distribute funding to the selected Tribal Wildlife Corridors. Funding allocation amounts will be determined on a per tribe basis and will depend on need and the number of grants distributed.

Eligible Activities

Funding will be used for the creation and development of new Tribal Wildlife Corridors. Funding will also be used for improving, maintaining, and updating infrastructure to modernize existing Tribal Wildlife Corridors. Specific activities that can be paid for by grant funding include, but are not limited to:

1. Construction of new corridors within tribal lands;
2. Facilitate habitat connectivity to public lands;
3. Improve existing corridors via maintenance, such as tree and shrub clearing or planting, new fencing, and/or other related maintenance activities;
4. Other activities related to the improvement of existing corridors;
5. Species monitoring studies and planning studies;
6. Invasive species management within corridors.

Other Core Activities

According to the bill's provisions and the discretion granted to the DOI, several activities will be included as core programming. Technical assistance will be offered to all grantees through two agencies within the DOI: the United States' Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). These agencies will provide tribes with the training and resources to better manage, maintain and restore their wildlife corridors, coordinate with private landowners, and access wildlife data. This may include the hiring of outside contractors and specialists. The consultation process and public comment period stipulated in the bill will also be a central tenet of the program, and tribal consultation will be a key part of developing program implementation strategies and goals.



Image 10: Coyote trotting through snow in Yellowstone National Park
Source: Daniel Lloyd Blunk-Fernández



Image 11: Brown buck at Tomales Point Trail
Source: Kyle Glenn

In addition, the Grant Program will align with the Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative, the DOI Equity Plan, and the commitment to Executive Order 13175. Justice40 is an executive order signed by President Biden in 2021 directing 40% of benefits from select federal government activities towards disadvantaged communities (*Executive Order 14008*, 2021). While this is a relatively nascent initiative, it is an important element of the Grant Program design to ensure that funding and resources will be allocated to disadvantaged and historically underfunded communities, including many Native American communities impacted by this Act.

EXECUTIVE ORDERS 13985 AND 13175



Image 12: Navajo Nation and US flag
Source: Paul Marshall

Executive Order 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, requires all federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior (DOI), to ensure that equity is rooted in all agency policy decisions and operations (*U.S. Department of Interior*, 2022). In response to EO 13985, the DOI issued its first Equity Action Plan in April 2022. One of the core priorities set by the DOI in this plan is to “improve access to and awareness of Tribal discretionary grant funding” (*U.S. Department of Interior*, 2022). By placing such a key emphasis on tribal consultation through the creation of a website and the hiring of external engagement contractors, the Program would help the DOI make progress towards this important, key priority.

EO 13175, *Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments*, requires that all federal agencies “establish regular and meaningful consultation and coordination” with tribal nations (*Executive Order 13175*, 2000). In response to President Biden’s recent memorandum reinforcing this commitment, the DOI has issued a Detailed Plan Document for improving their consultation process. The Program would align with a number of the key action items laid out in this plan, including the improvement of localized consultation for policies and actions that only impact one or few Tribes (*U.S. Department of the Interior*, 2021).

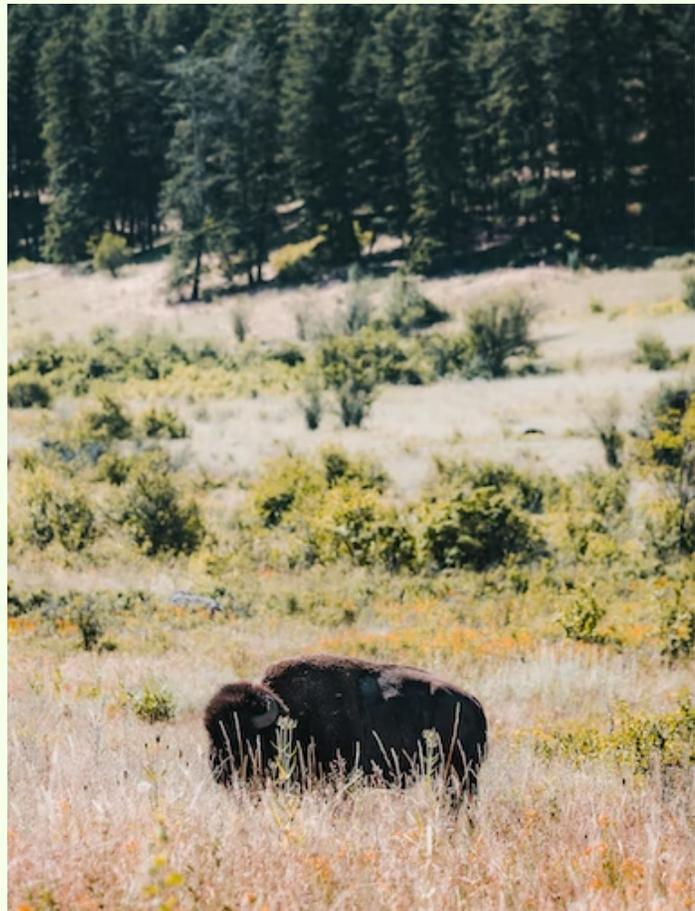


Image 13: Bison seen in National Bison Range, Montana
Source: Yohan Marion

Rationale and Other Options Considered

The primary goal of the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act is to increase connectivity across habitat fragments. To facilitate this goal, our team's proposal is to prioritize funding distribution towards the Tribal Wildlife Corridors that have the most ecological impact for increased connectivity due to the migration of species or connection to public lands.

Beyond the environmental benefits of prioritizing ecologically significant fragmented land, this bottom-up approach encourages tribes to state exactly what funding is needed for in their communities, rather than having priorities be prescribed by the DOI.

Other grant program design options considered include:

1. Prioritizing the quantity of corridors funded
2. Prioritizing the quality, then quantity of corridors funded in a phased approach

Prioritizing quantity would allocate funding to as many tribes and areas as possible, therefore allowing the greatest number of tribal communities and ecosystems to benefit. Prioritizing quality, then quantity would provide a mix of allocating funding widely in the first years of the program, then focusing on the ecological impacts of corridors in later years.

Our decision to prioritize quality enables the distribution of funds towards the Tribal Wildlife Corridors with the greatest biological impact and will benefit both species and tribal land management, while also achieving the Act's objective of increasing connectivity. While fewer tribes may be supported by this approach, the biological impact will be much higher and will result in a more meaningful cultural impact for each participating tribe.

Image 14: Orange warbler in Stokes State Forest
Source: Ray Hennessy



Year One Program Implementation Plan

To implement the Tribal Wildlife Corridor Designation process and the Grant Program (hereafter referred to as “the Program”) as designed, a Year One Program Implementation Plan is proposed. This plan outlines the recruiting and training, strategic planning, and criteria development tasks that must be completed for the Program’s success.

Delegation, Recruiting and Training

| Task | Targets | Task Manager | Months (in Year 1) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|--|--|--|--|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | | | | |
| Delegation, Recruiting, and Training | Delegation of Program Director | Secretary of the DOI | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Defining specific targets for the first three years | Program Director | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Develop job descriptions and advertise for new program staff | | | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Formation of Technical Advisory Group (TAG) | | | | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Hiring program team | | | | | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Onboarding program team | | | | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Hiring external consultants for tribal assistance and outreach | | | | | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | |
| | Training and development | | | | | | | | | █ | | | | | | | | |

Table 1: Delegation, Recruiting, and Training Plan

Recruiting Program Staff

The first six months of Year One will focus on recruiting and training the Program team. The designation of a Program Director, employment of two new staff, and establishment of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) are proposed to manage the Program. These individuals will facilitate the development of criteria for corridor nominations within the first 18 months of enactment and the distribution of grants to tribes within three years of enactment.



Image 15: Orange fox in field in Silverthorne, Colorado
Source: Nathan Anderson



Image 16: Male western bluebird perched on a stone

Source: Benoit Gauzere

The Program Director will not be a new employee; rather, it will be an additional responsibility for an existing employee: the Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System program in the United States Fish Wildlife Service (USFWS) branch of the Department of Interior (DOI). The four main offices of the USFWS are the National Wildlife Refuge System, Fish and Aquatic Conservation, Migratory Bird Program, and Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration. The Refuge System is the appropriate office to implement the Program because it prioritizes holistic ecosystem management with the goal of ecosystem health, rather than management of a particular species for human use. Wildlife corridors are a critical part of the Refuge System’s strategy, as they connect protected refuge lands together, allowing them to more effectively protect migratory species and the health of the whole landscape. As such, the existing Refuge System staff will be able to pull from experience and expertise in designing and managing wildlife corridors. The Chief currently oversees lands and waters for the conservation, management, and restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats across the United States (USFWS, n.d.). They will also be expected to oversee the Program and its employees, make recommendations for the Secretary of Interior, and act as the leading ecological expert on wildlife corridor management.

This program also necessitates the hiring of two new full-time staff:

1. Program Manager, reporting to the Program Director and hired within the first three months under the National Wildlife Refuge System program in the USFWS, will lead the strategic planning efforts of the program, including the development of corridor designation, review of corridor nominations, oversight of administrative tasks, and facilitation of communication and outreach between agencies, tribes, landowners, and other relevant stakeholders.
2. Grant Manager, reporting to the Program Director and hired within the first six months under the branch of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Recreation in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), will lead the Grant Program. This includes designing the grant application, reviewing the applications, and distributing grant funding, in addition to establishing partnerships with tribes, as well as federal, state, and local governments, academic institutions, and other non-government organizations. Within the first 18 months of the program's start, the Grant Manager will also issue a Request for Information (RFI) to receive input from Native American tribes about opportunities for the program to best support tribal goals and needs.

Both of these full-time employees will be based at the DOI headquarters in Washington, D.C. Since they will be high-level technical specialists and are likely to have advanced degrees, both employees will be hired at the GS-14 level. A 2019 CBO estimate for a previous iteration of the bill also called for two new employees at the GS-14 level (*Congressional Budget Office*, 2020). The salary for a full-time, GS-14 level employee in Washington DC in 2022 is \$126,333 and offers fringe benefits of 20-30% (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2022). Therefore, \$315,832.50 will be allocated for the hiring of these two new employees during the first year of the program.



Image 17

Source: Department of Interior



Image 18

Source: US Fish and Wildlife Service



Image 19

Source: Bureau of Indian Affairs

Formation of Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

The TAG is another component necessary for successful implementation of the Program. Members of this group may be staff from non-governmental organizations, scientists and academics from various institutions, tribal representatives, or employees from other government agencies who are volunteering their time. Examples of such organizations include the National Wildlife Federation, the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, and other government agency programs, such as the National Native American Programs division of the USFWS. These individuals are expected to provide recommendations for developing the criteria for corridor designation and grant allocation; as such, expertise is needed in land management, various ecological concepts (e.g., population, ecosystem, terrestrial, aquatic ecology), tribal environmental contexts, and other disciplines as pertinent. In addition, the TAG should include experts in Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK), a body of observations, oral and written knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promotes environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems. ITEK was recently recognized by the Biden administration as a formal body of knowledge to be considered alongside other political and scientific knowledge in federal policymaking and implementation (*The White House*, 2022b).



Image 20: Heron wading in water, Great Smoky Mountains
Source: Delaney Van

There are no staffing costs associated with this volunteer group. However, there will be a TAG annual meeting to bring members together and provide a forum to share their expertise and provide recommendations for criteria for the Tribal Wildlife Corridor Designation process and the Grant Program. \$22,000 will be allocated for costs associated with the first TAG annual meeting (\$10,000 for food and space costs, \$600 per member for hotel, and \$400 per member for travel, assuming 12 members of the TAG).

Contracting Plan

During the primary stages of program development, the Program Manager and the Grant Manager will work in tandem to both inform tribal communities about the existence and benefits of the Grant Program and receive feedback on how it can best support tribes. To assist in this effort, an external contracting firm specializing in public outreach will be hired to communicate with tribes about the Program.



Image 21: Florida burrowing owl in Cape Coral, Florida
Source: Ray Hennessy



Image 22: Two deer in Yosemite Valley
Source: Johannes Andersson

The outreach contractor, who will report to the Program Manager, will engage with tribal leaders and community members to share the opportunities that the Program creates and gather information on tribes' support for and concerns about the Program. They also may travel in person to reservations that have the greatest opportunity for impactful wildlife corridors. In addition, they will compile and analyze feedback, both collected in person and from the RFI, which will inform the TAG's decisions and criteria development. These actions follow the DOI's Equity Action Plan to improve tribal access to federal grants as well as DOI Secretary Deb Haaland's plan to improve tribal consultation in the Department's decision-making processes. Namely, this increases accessibility to grants for tribes, who may be unaware of the range of opportunities available, lack the technical capacity to apply, or are constrained by complex and redundant forms necessary to apply for the grants.

Outsourcing this task to a contracting firm is necessary because it will be time and labor intensive and the DOI does not have the capacity to hire the specialized, full-time employees that the task will require. Potential bidders can be drawn from a list of prior federal government contractors specializing in marketing and public opinion research (e.g., Government Contracts.com). This contract will last for the first 18 months of the program until the grant program opens for applications, and funding will be limited to \$150,000 per annum. This shall cover the full scope of work, including any potential travel, meals, and other expenses as needed. The contractor’s success will be measured by the number of tribes that they visit and engage with, as well as the creation of a report that summarizes the tribe’s feedback.

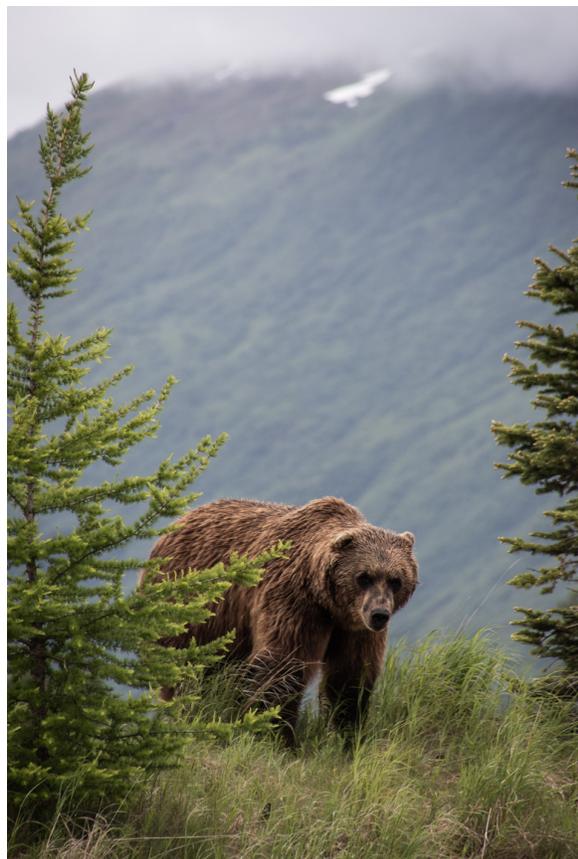


Image 23: Grizzly bear at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center
Source: John Thomas



Image 24: Rabbit at Oslo Bay Wetlands Preserve, Texas
Source: Joshua Cotten

In addition, within the first 18 months of the program, a thorough contracting plan will be developed by the Program Manager for external contractors that will support the creation and maintenance of wildlife corridors. Some of the activities that these contractors will conduct include reestablishing native species, removing human impediments, and providing species monitoring services to measure the success of the program.

Strategic Planning

| Task | Targets | Task Manager | Months (in Year 1) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|--|--|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | | |
| Strategic Planning and Administrative Outreach | Creation of a work plan to achieve milestones for Year 1, 2, and 3 | Program Director and Program Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Outreach to existing 12 regional BIA offices staff | Program Manager and Grant Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Creation of a program information and service website for tribes | Program Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 2: Strategic Planning and Administrative Outreach Plan

In the second half of Year One, the Program Director and Program Manager will lay out a plan for achieving program milestones. This strategic program implementation plan will consist of the list of activities to be done during the first year, the money required for these activities, and how monetary and human resources can best be managed in the given time frame. During the primary stages of program development, the Program Manager and the Grant Manager will consult with existing BIA staff responsible for each of the 12 BIA regions across the country (see Image 25). The existing relationships that these regional staff have with the local tribes in their region are critical, and must be utilized to ensure program priorities are aligned with and aware of tribal priorities. To employ these relationships, the Grant Manager and Program Manager will travel to conduct outreach and meetings with regional staff and engage with tribes. \$28,800 will be allocated for these travel costs. Simultaneously, the Program Manager will create outreach materials and a website for tribes to access program related information and assistance.



- 12 BIA Regions**
- Northwest Pacific
 - Rocky Mountain
 - Western
 - Alaska
 - Navajo
 - Southwest
 - Great Plains
 - Southern Pain
 - Eastern Oklahoma
 - Midwest
 - Eastern

Image 25: 12 regions in BIA Source: Bureau of Indian Affairs

Criteria Development

| Task | Targets | Task Manager | Months (in Year 1) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|--|--|--|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | | | |
| Tribal Consultation and Criteria Development | Issuance of Request for Information (RFI) | Program Manager and Grant Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Conduct tribal community outreach activities for awareness regarding the program | Program Manager, Grant Manager, and External Consultants | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Conduct outreach through digital and print media regarding the program | Program Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Tribal consultation program | Program Manager, Grant Manager, and External Consultants | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Screening of feedbacks from consultation program | External Consultants | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Respond to attendees of tribal consultation program | Program Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 3: Tribal Consultation and Criteria Development Plan

An important program milestone is to develop criteria for corridor designation and grant distribution. In order to start the designation process in Year Two, criteria development must begin in Year One and continue until the first half of Year Two. The Program Manager and Grant Manager will first disseminate an RFI so that tribes and other interested parties can provide input on the program design and criteria development. This will be followed by the Program Manager, Grant Manager, and external consultants conducting outreach activities within different tribal communities to provide awareness of the Program. Simultaneously, the Program Manager will conduct outreach through digital and print media to enhance tribal outreach. Tribal consultation will continue beyond the RFI and initial outreach, and will be a key tenet of program development throughout.

Total Year One Budget

The total budget of the first fiscal year of implementation of the Program is \$536,633. It can be seen in Figure 3 that from the total budget, 58.9% (i.e. \$315,833) will be expended for staff salaries, accounting for the creation of two new staffers: a Grant Manager and a Program Manager. While the TAG members are not paid employees, there will be \$22,000 expended for TAG costs associated with their first annual meeting. Additionally, there will be \$28,800 expended for travel costs, as it is imperative that these employees travel to the 12 different regions of the BIA to collaborate with their staff and engage with tribes. Lastly, 28% of the total budget amounting to \$150,000 will be set aside for tribal outreach costs to consult and collaborate with tribes throughout the program design and implementation process.

Year 1 Program Budget

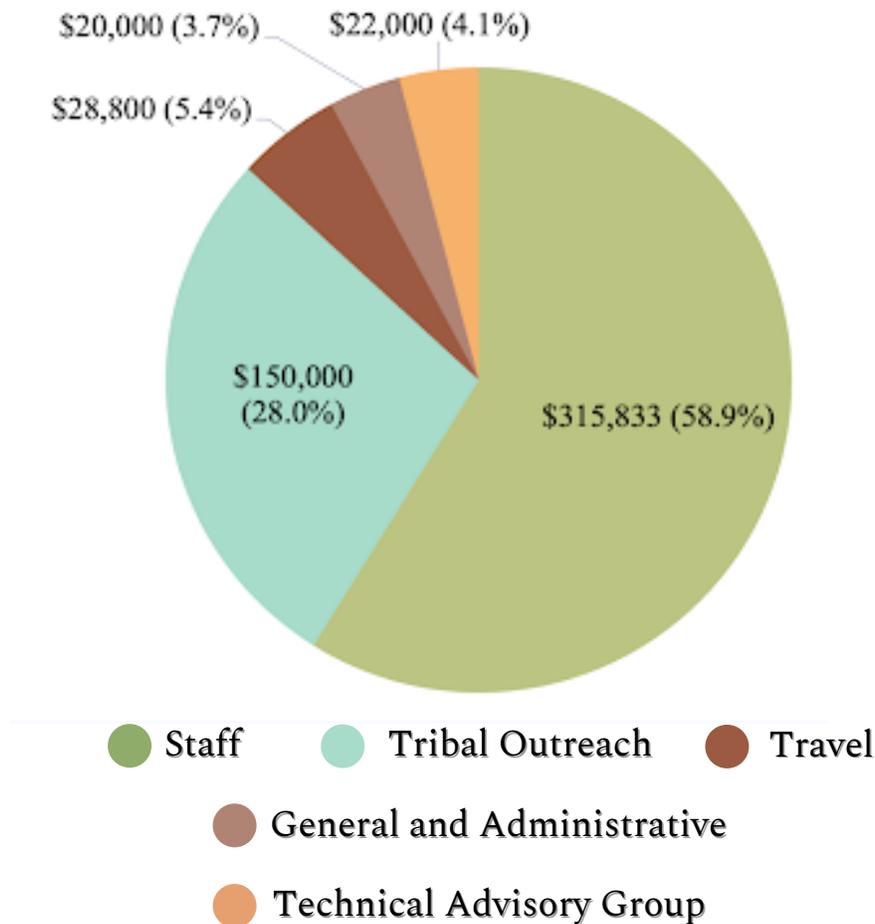


Figure 3: Budget for Year One

Future Program Implementation and Budget

| Year 2 Goal: Emphasis on corridor designation and grant allocation | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| Task | Task Manager | Months (in Year 2) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Criteria Development | Program Manager, Grant Manager, and Technical Advisory Group | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tribal Nominations | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grant Development | Grant Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grant Application Period | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grant Review | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

| Year 3 Goal: Emphasis on corridor designation and grant allocation | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| Task | Task Manager | Months (in Year 3) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Grant Application Period | Grant Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grant Review | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grant Application Based on Grant Criteria | Program Director and Grant Manager | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Technical Assistance | Program Staff, Contractors, Technical Advisory Group, and DOI | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Commencement of Corridor Creation | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Tables 4 and 5: Future Implementation Plans for Year Two and Three

The Act also mandates tasks for Years Two and Three. The priorities in Year Two are to emphasize corridor designation and to develop the Grant Program. The first half of Year Two will focus on criteria development. The Program Manager, Grant Manager, and TAG will work together to finalize the criteria based on feedback received from tribes and other stakeholders.

In the second half of Year Two, the corridor designation process will begin. Tribes will have a five month period to submit their nominations for a “Tribal Wildlife Corridor” designation to the DOI. Designation nominations will be reviewed by the Program Manager, and the DOI will have 90 days after receiving a nomination to approve or reject it. Concurrently, grant applications will be open to tribes for the final three months of Year Two, and the grant review period will begin for a period of four months at the end of Year Two into Year Three. Grant applications will be reviewed by the Grant Manager who will lead the creation of the grant development program and criteria. Subsequent annual grant applications and reviews will follow the same schedule outlined.

The tasks for Year Three focus on grant distribution and technical assistance. The Program Director and Grant Manager will allocate the first grant in the third month of Year Three. Once the grant distribution period begins, administrative and monitoring costs will constitute 2.5% and 5% of the total congressional funding of \$50 million (as shown in Figure 4) as per the increase in need for staffing, contracting, and monitoring. Technical assistance would be allotted 2.5% of the total funding and the remaining 90%, or \$47.5 million, will be grants allocated to tribes across the country.

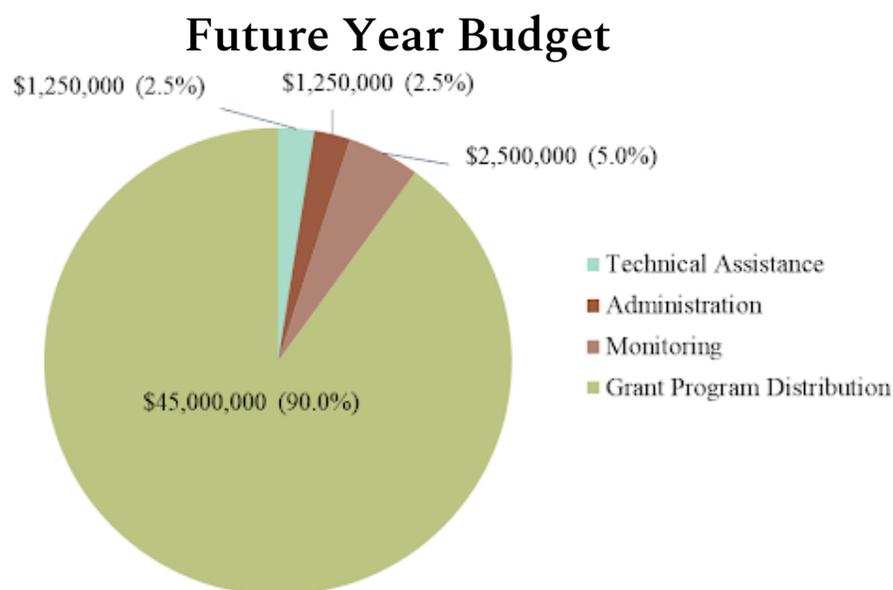


Figure 4: Future program implementation budget

Year One Program Implementation Plan

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Measuring Success of the Program

In order to measure the implementation and the impact of the program design, a performance measurement system will be established. This will allow for ongoing monitoring and transparency during the implementation process.

The performance management system has four major objectives:

1. Define measurements used to evaluate the program's implementation;
2. Indicate how these measurements will be collected;
3. Designate how these measurements will be reported and to whom;
4. Establish a clear feedback mechanism and define how it impacts decision-making.



Image 26: Destroyed forest in Chester, California
Source: Roya Ann Miller

Program Goals - Key Performance Indicators

The success of the program will be measured against the achievement of its two primary goals of increasing habitat connectivity and increasing tribal self-sovereignty. To measure the success of these goals, the following two primary Key Performance Indicators will be established:

i. Increase Habitat Connectivity on Tribal Lands

The program aims to increase species movement across habitats on tribal lands. This is a quantitative goal.

ii. Increase the Number of Tribes Assisted by the Program

The program aims to increase the number of tribes receiving funding for conservation projects from the federal government. This is a quantitative goal.



Image 27: Denali National Park and Reserve in Alaska
Source: Joris Beugels

Measurement and Collecting Procedures

There will be three sets of measures: Operational and Administrative, Environmental, and Social. The Operational and Administrative measurements will be provided by the operational team, made up of the Program Director, the Program Manager, and the Grant Manager at the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Indians Affairs (BIA). The Environmental and Social measures will be collected by the DOI’s 12 regional teams.

1. Operational and Administrative Measures

This set of measures evaluates the implementation of the program’s administrative activities and are intended to provide data to the Tribal Wildlife Corridors team. This data is quantitative in nature and will be collected by the team using administrative sources, such as the nomination application form, grant application documents, and financial documentation. Data will be measured as described in the table below:

| | Objective | Metrics | Collecting |
|--|--|---|---|
| Operational and Administrative Measures | 1. Establish the criteria for corridor nomination within 18 months | 1.1 Finalized criteria for wildlife corridor nomination | 1.1.1 Data provided by the Program Manager based on information from the applications |
| | 2. Execute 100% of the budget (beginning in Year 3) | 2.1 Amount of resources spent during the fiscal year | 2.1.1 Data provided by the Program Manager |
| | 3. Hire the administrative and operational team within 18 months | 3.1 Number of employees hired | 3.1.1 Data provided by the Program Director |
| | 4. Analyze and respond to 100% of grant applications | 4.1 Number of applications analyzed | 4.1.1 Data provided by the Grant Manager |

Table 6: Operational and Administrative Measures

2. Environmental Measures

The second set of measures evaluates the environmental impact of the program. These will be collected by the DOI’s 12 regional offices. Data will be measured as described in the table below:

| | Objective | Metrics | Collecting |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Environmental Measures | 1. Increase habitat connectivity in those tribal lands supported by the program in 10 years | 1.1 Number of corridors built | 1.1.1 Data provided by the DOI's regional offices |
| | | 1.2 Number of invasive species using the corridor | |
| | | 1.3 Amount of area connecting fragmented habitats | |
| | 2. Increase species movement between corridors in 10 years | 2.1 Number of species utilizing the corridor | |
| | | 2.2 Number of umbrella species utilizing the corridor | |
| | | 2.3 Population gene flow between habitat fragments | |
| | | 2.4 Number of migratory species using the corridor | |

Table 7: Environmental Measures

3. Social Measures

This set of measures evaluates the social impact of the program, particularly the impact on tribal nations and the alignment with Justice40. This data will be provided by the DOI’s regional offices in consultation with tribes. Data will be measured as described in the table below:

| | Objective | Metrics | Collecting |
|------------------------|--|---|---|
| Social Measures | 1. Improve tribal engagement with the federal government | 1.1 Number of tribes assisted by the program | 1.1.1 Data provided by the Program Director |
| | | 1.2 Tribal perception and feedback on the program | 1.2.1 Data provided by contractors |
| | | 1.3 Number of tribes consulted by the program | 1.3.1 Data provided by contractors |
| | 2. Positive impact of culturally important species to tribes | 2.1 Number of culturally important species using the corridor | 2.1.1 Data provided by the DOI's regional offices |

Table 8: Social Measures

Reporting Structure

The reporting structure aims to consolidate the data from these measurements to provide various parties with insight on program implementation progress. There will be three separate types of reports that analyze different aspects of program success:

1. **Operational and Administrative Report**

The Operational and Administrative Report's objective is to examine if the program is meeting the goals mandated in the bill and outlined in the yearly program implementation plan, as well as to suggest areas for improvement. This report will use the information and data from the Operational and Administrative measures, will be produced quarterly, and will be directed towards the Program Director.

2. **Strategic Report**

The Strategic Report uses the Environmental and Social measures to analyze the impact of the technical assistance and grant funding at improving habitat connectivity, protecting culturally important species, and engaging tribes in federal government decision-making.. It will be directed towards the Director of the USFWS and the BIA, and it will be produced biannually.

3. **High-Level Report**

The High-Level Report summarizes and draws connections between the previous reports to analyze whether or not the program is achieving its stated goals. The report is directed towards the Secretary of the DOI, but it will also be presented to Congress and made available for civil society. It will be produced once a year.

Feedback Structure

A feedback structure is essential to the performance measurement system, and it provides a pathway for program supervisors to make appropriate recommendations for program changes based on the data presented in the reports.

The Secretary of the Interior will provide annual feedback on the High Level Report to the Directors of the USFWS and the BIA, who will in turn provide feedback on the Strategic Report binannually to the Program Director. The Program Director will then provide feedback on the Operational and Administrative Report to the Program Manager and Grant Manager. This will ensure that the goals and priorities of all parties are aligned.

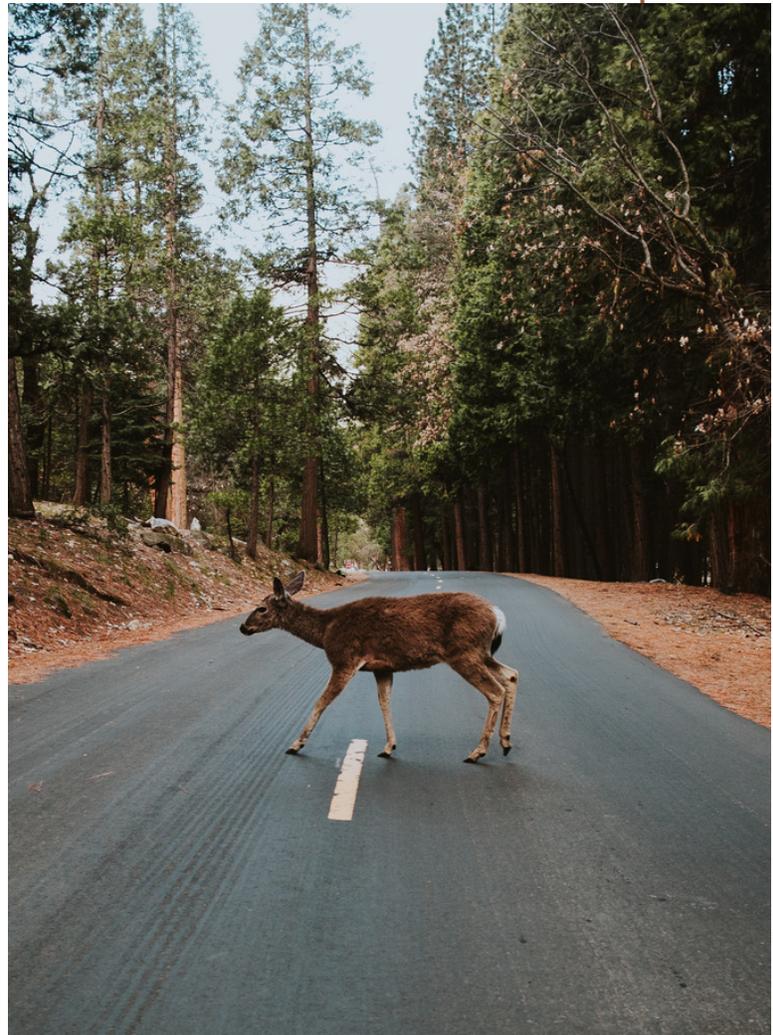


Image 28: Deer crossing Yosemite National Park Road in Utah
Source: Ivana Cajina



Image 29: Brown bear catching salmon at Brooks Falls in Katmai National Park, Alaska
Source: Donna Ruiz



Image 30: Pronghorn at the Flaming Gorge Reservoir, Utah

Source: Patrick Hendry

Conclusion

Decades of severe underfunding by the federal government towards Native American tribal land management programming has led to land degradation and loss of culturally important species on tribal reservations. This issue is part of a global trend of biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation exacerbated by human development and climate change. The Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2021 is a small yet essential step towards remediation. \$50 million annually will allocate funding explicitly towards tribal nations for wildlife corridors. By mandating a procedural means for tribes to nominate a wildlife corridor and creating a grant program to stimulate the creation and maintenance of corridors, tribes can better protect and manage their land, wildlife, and natural resources. An emphasis on tribal-led nomination, an application-based grant program, and tribal consultation throughout the program development ensures tribal involvement through an inherent bottom up approach. This report publication is especially timely following the recent completion of the 2022 White House Tribal Nations Summit. This Summit highlights the importance of tribal-led efforts across a wide range of policies and specialities, and it is our hope that this report helps to emphasize the same importance from a wildlife conservation perspective (*The White House, 2022a*).

To conclude, we end with a quote from the recently published Department of Interior Equity Plan:

“

The Department is leaning into its moral and legal responsibilities to Tribes by honoring sovereignty and reckoning with DOI's role in the history of injustice and marginalization of Indigenous people. Leaders are learning from past mistakes through nation-to-nation consultation, listening for understanding, ethically co-producing, sharing, using evidence and data for decision-making, and employing analytic tools to advance and promote equity and justice in all that we do for Tribes, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and the American public."

- U.S. Department of the Interior, 2022

Through the passage and implementation of the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act of 2021, the United States government through the Department of the Interior will take important steps not only to address habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss, but also to continue to correct historical injustices and increase funding for Native American tribes.



Image 31: Wild turkeys in the Cataloochee Valley, North Carolina

Source: Kirk Thornton

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